

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, FONSI AND DECISION RECORD

BLM, Bishop Resource Area
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514

EA Number: CA-170-05-27

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: Rangeland Improvement Project System (RIPS) 7718

Proposed Action Title/Type: Galactic Well Pipeline Extension

Location of Proposed Action: Bodie Mountain Allotment 6071
T4N; R27E; Secs. 14 SW¼, 15 SE ¼, and 23 NW¼

Applicant (if any): BLM Bishop Field Office Range Staff and
Flying M Cattle Co.
BLM Grazing Permittee Authorization #1646

Plan Conformance

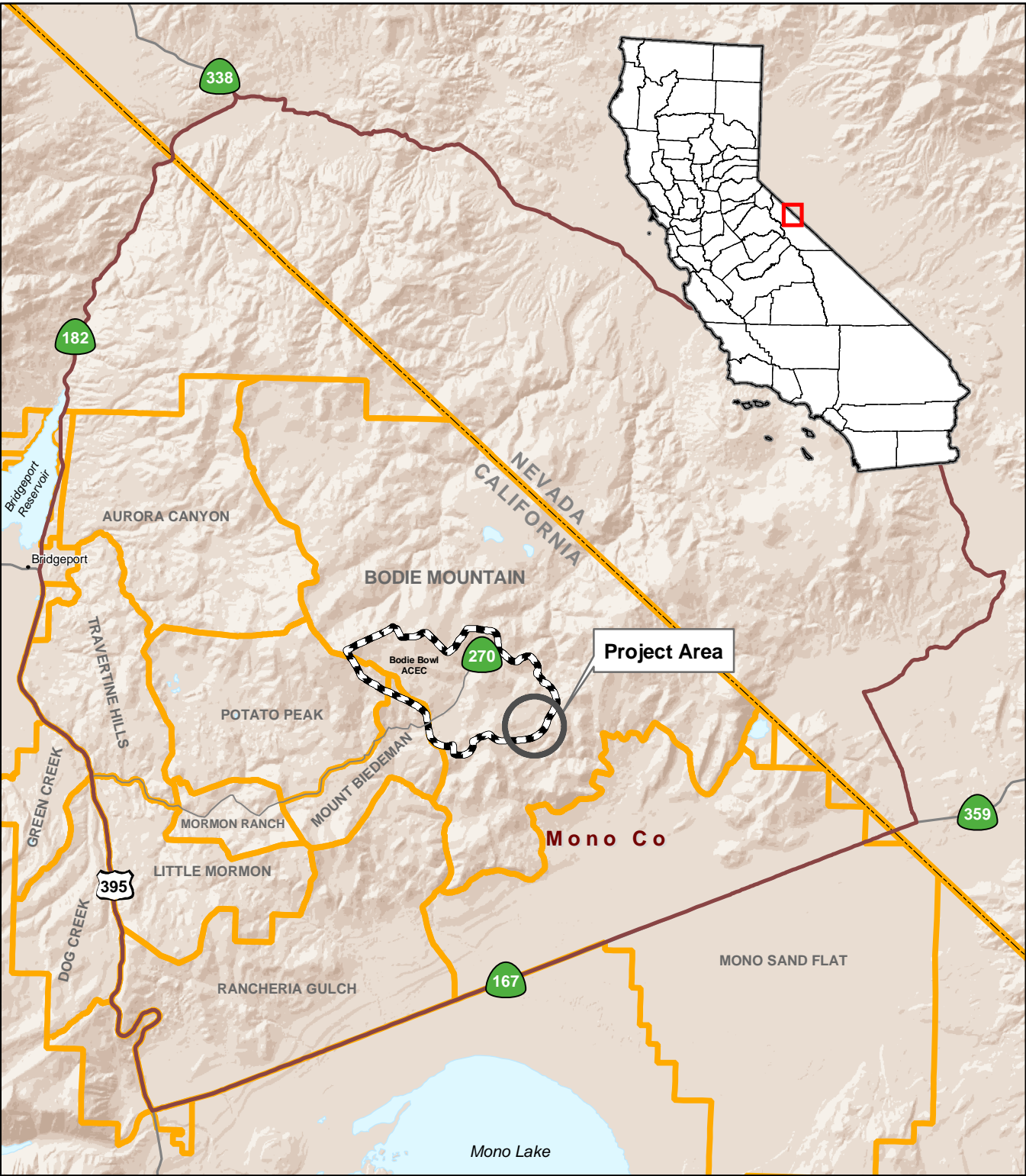
The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved March 25, 1993 and the Bodie Mountain Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP), approved May 1992. The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with these plans.

Need for Proposed Action

Poor livestock distribution has resulted in insufficient use of forage resources on upland sites and overuse of riparian areas, aspen groves, and meadows in the Bodie Mountain allotment (CRMP 1992). A primary resource objective of the CRMP is to improve livestock distribution to achieve moderate (40-60 percent) utilization levels and increase vegetation production on riparian, aspen, meadow, and upland habitats. The more recent Central California Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing (Record of Decision, signed July 13, 2000) sets maximum average utilization levels for sagebrush grasslands at 40 percent.

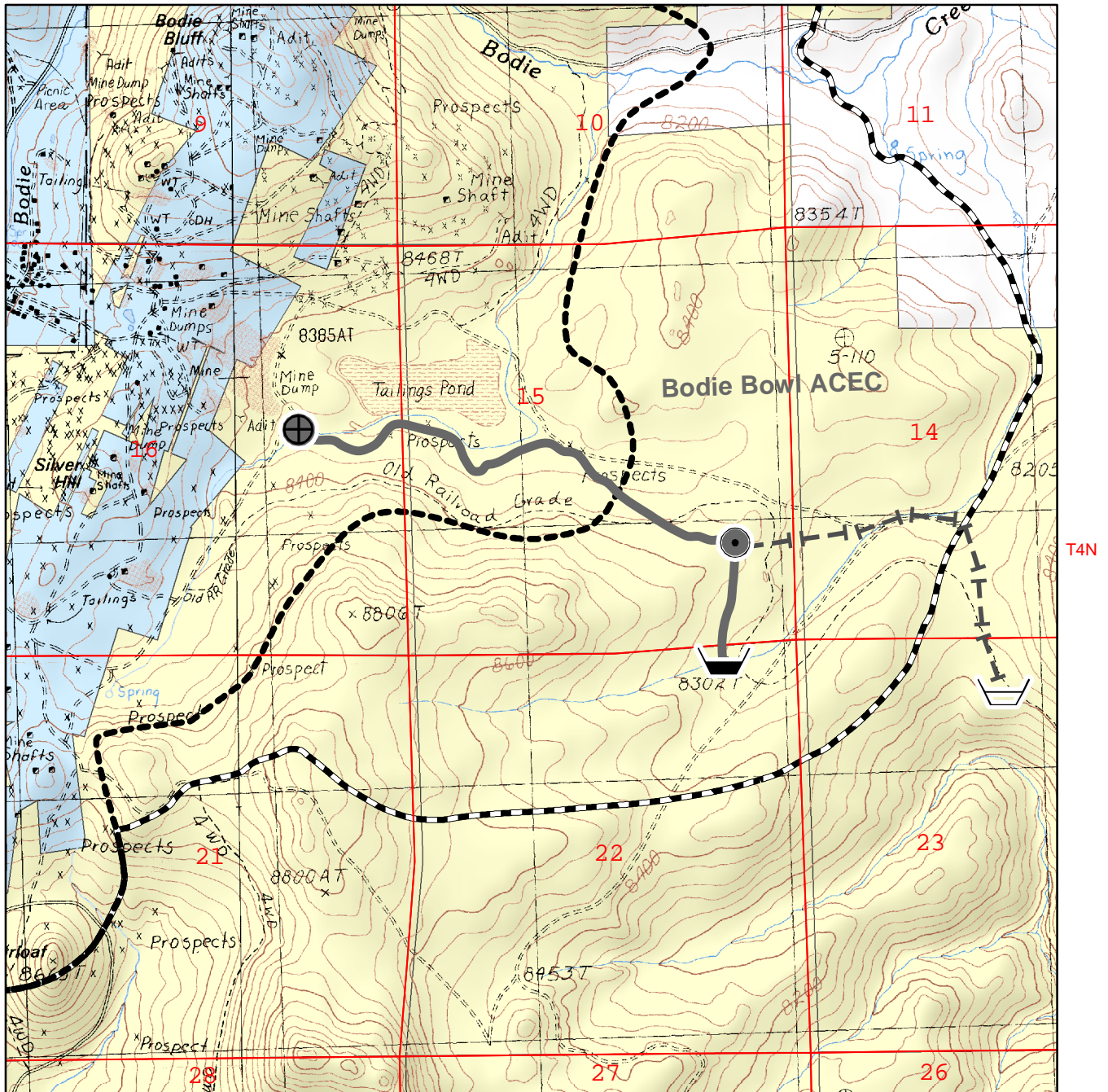
In an effort to provide a reliable water source and to better distribute cattle in the eastern portion of the Bodie Bowl Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), the initial Galactic Well Pipeline (RIPS 7718; EA Number CA-170-00-47) was proposed (Figures 1 and 2). The project was completed in 2000 and successfully distributed cattle grazing in the Bodie Mountain allotment. Allotment utilization levels measured in 2001 were low at 18% (Bodie Mountain Utilization Studies 6071, Bishop Field Office files). These low utilization levels in this portion of the allotment indicate better distribution of cattle. In a memorandum summarizing these data, the BLM botanist indicated that, in general, cattle use appeared to be dispersed.

Figure 1. Project Vicinity, Bodie Mountain Allotment



- Bodie Coordinated Resource Management Planning Area
- ▤ BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- ▭ BLM Grazing Allotment Boundary

Figure 2. Project Location, Galactic Well Pipeline Extension



Projection NAD83 CA Teale Albers
 USGS 7.5' Quadrangles:
 Bodie and Kirkwood Springs, CA
 M.D.B.M., T4N, R27E, Sections 14, 15, 16, 22, 23

R27E

1:24,000

0 950 1,900 3,800 Feet

- Bureau of Land Management
- Bodie State Park
- Private
- BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Draft National Historic Landmark Boundary

- Existing pipeline
- Proposed pipeline extension
- Existing well
- Existing tank
- Existing trough
- Proposed trough



The proposed Galactic Pipeline Extension would carry water to a new trough location approximately one mile east of the existing storage tank (Figure 2). The project would better distribute grazing in a currently under-utilized portion of the Bodie Mountain allotment. Better grazing distribution in the allotment would contribute to improvement in meeting the fundamentals of rangeland health required by the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines. The addition of a storage tank would allow the permittee to store more water with each trip to the water pump. By having to make fewer trips to the pump to provide water to livestock, the permittee will have more opportunities to manage livestock (e.g. herd management) and maintain existing range improvement projects.

Description of Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to install 4,500 linear feet of 1.25-inch polyethylene pipe from the existing storage tank location to a new trough location in Sections 14 and 23 (Figure 2). Flying M Cattle Co., the grazing permittee, will install a 1,000-gallon wildlife friendly water trough at the proposed location in Section 23. Furthermore, the grazing permittee will provide and install an additional 5,000 to 10,000 gallon storage tank next to the existing tank in Section 15.

The polyethylene pipe would be hand carried or rolled across the ground from existing roads to its final location. No cross-country vehicular travel, blading of the soil surface, or removal of vegetation is proposed. The pipe would be routed between the trunks of the existing shrubs to better blend the line with the surrounding environment. The existing vehicle route to the existing storage tank would be used to deliver the larger replacement storage tank.

The project would be installed above-ground with black polyethylene pipe for a period of two years to allow observation and reconsideration of the project's effectiveness in redistributing livestock and meeting Rangeland Health Standards, and to allow evaluation and monitoring of potential impacts to sage grouse roosting areas and/or use of lek 4b. If the pipeline meets the proposed need with acceptable impacts, the pipe would be buried using hand tools (e.g. Pulaski, picks, shovels) at a depth of 6 to 12 inches.

The project is planned to be constructed in August 2006 or later depending on weather and road conditions.

No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, no pipeline extension would be constructed or additional storage tank would be used. The opportunity to better distribute livestock grazing into currently unused forage areas would not occur. Continued over-utilization of current grazing areas would occur and would not meet rangeland health standards required by the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines. Furthermore, the permittee will have to spend more time pumping water to the existing storage tank,

which consumes more person-hours, places more wear on a primitive road, and is less cost effective.

Alternatives Considered But Rejected

Alternative Routes

An additional branch line, heading farther east into Section 14 from the proposed route was considered. The cultural resources field exam for both routes revealed concerns for potential impacts to artifacts discovered on the surface with more potential of additional artifacts in the subsurface. Therefore, the east branch route was eliminated from the project proposal.

Additionally, there is no other area into which the pipeline could be routed due to a combination of topography (steep slopes), accessibility, means of construction, and lack of water head pressure (drop) to gravity feed water to a new trough site.

Water Hauling Alternative

Water hauling is not a cost effective means of providing the necessary daily amount of water needed for the number of cattle expected to use the area. Expense, time considerations, rough roads, and distance to a water supply source were all factors considered in this alternative.

Affected Environment / Environmental Impacts

Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Wild and Scenic Rivers

The proposed action is not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, or Wild and Scenic River corridor, there would be no impacts to any lands so designated.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

A portion of the proposed action does lie within the Bodie Bowl ACEC (see Figure 1). The key objectives of the Bodie Bowl ACEC Management Plan that have a direct bearing on this project are as follows.

Objective B: Protect the visual characteristics of the ACEC that contribute to the Bodie Experience; and ensure that any development allowed is compatible with the existing historic landscape.

Policy 1: Any facility or structure (for commercial or non-commercial purpose) constructed on federal lands within the Bodie Bowl ACEC shall be constructed so that it is compatible with what currently exists within the

Bowl, including the town of Bodie. This means that the outward appearance shall be of similar color, line, form, scale, type, materials and appearance, but not necessarily a re-creation of existing structure.

Action 1.2: Agricultural facilities on federal lands within the ACEC should be unobtrusive and/or in character with the existing historic landscape.

AND

Objective L: Any economic and resource development projects on federal lands will be done in a manner that will protect the historic and scenic values and will not detract from the Bodie Experience.

Policy 1: Except for mineral and grazing activities, commercial or concessionaire development on public lands shall be restricted to those that complement or enhance the Bodie Experience.

Action 1: Grazing on federal lands within the ACEC will be guided by the Bishop RMP and CRMPs (Coordinated Resource Management Plans). Developments within the ACEC will be guided by the visual policies in "Resource Protection, Objective B" above.

The planned placement of the storage tank is near the edge of the ACEC boundary and away from the vast majority of visitor use, which is within the town of Bodie (i.e. Bodie State Park). The tank would be painted a color that blends with the surrounding vegetation and would be sited as unobtrusively as feasible. The portion of the proposed new pipeline route, approximately one-half of the entire planned pipeline length, also lies within the ACEC boundary; however, it would not be visible from high traffic areas like Bodie Creek Road. Both planned actions would be in accord with the Policies and Actions referenced above because their design, color, and location conforms to the landscape and historic character of the area.

Air Quality

There would be no impacts to Air Quality. The proposed action is within the Mono Basin/Owens Valley Federal Non-attainment Area. The proposed action is not within Federal Air Quality Non-attainment Area. The proposed action would not result in the emission of PM₁₀.

Listed or Endangered Species

There are no known listed or candidate species or habitats within the proposed action area. There would be no impact to listed or sensitive species.

Farm Lands, Flood Plains, Water Quality

There would be no impacts to Farm Lands, Flood Plains, or Water Quality, including ground or surface waters as they do not exist within the project area.

Cultural resources

BLM archaeologists conducted a Class III intensive field survey on 10/06/04. No archaeological sites were identified within the proposed project area; two isolates were identified and recorded. The proposed project would have no effect on cultural resources. For further details, see CA-170-04-31.

Visual resources

The project area lies within a Visual Resource Management (VRM) class 2 designation. The VRM criteria for this class states that changes in any of the basic elements of form, line color, or texture should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. The storage tank would be painted a color that blends with the surrounding vegetation and would be sited as unobtrusively as feasible. The tank and pipeline route would not be visible from high traffic areas like Bodie Creek Road. The pipeline would be routed between the trunks of the existing shrubs to better blend the line with the surrounding environment. The burying of the pipe by hand would create minimal ground disturbance and would be groomed by hand with rakes to restore the area to its natural contour. The surrounding vegetation is of sufficient composition and density to facilitate natural revegetation of the route within two to three years. The project would meet VRM standards because of the design and location of facilities and infrequent visitor use to the area.

Vegetation

Vegetation is composed primarily of mountain big sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata vaseyana*), Thurber's needlegrass (*Acnatherum thurberiana*), squirrel tail (*Elymus elymoides*), and a few species of perennial forbs. Canopy cover is approximately 25-35% with about 10-15% litter. Minimal disturbance or damage to the plants would occur. Some trampling and loss of vegetation would occur in an area of about 50 meters (164 feet) in diameter around the proposed trough due to the natural congregation of cattle around water sources. Overall, better cattle distribution would contribute to an improvement in vegetation condition across the allotment, facilitating meeting the fundamentals of rangeland health required by the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines.

Soils

Soils are an association of loamy, mixed, Argic Lithic Cryoborolls and loamy skeletal, mixed Pachic Cryoborolls occurring on 15-50 percent slopes. Slopes along the project route are approximately 0-10 percent and are not easily erodible by wind or water. Soil

compaction from livestock trampling would occur on 1.94 acres (50 meter radius) immediately surrounding the trough site.

Invasive, non-native species

There are no invasive species along the proposed route. However, there is a sparse amount of cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) along the road edge in Section 24 and nearby slopes due to a past wildfire. Once the trough is operational, an area about 50 meters in diameter (0.79 hectares or 1.94 acres), would become disturbed from cattle concentrating at the water source. The opportunity exists for further cheat grass or other invasive species to colonize in the disturbed area. The project is not anticipated to accelerate the proliferation of cheat grass within the existing plant community.

Wildlife habitat

The project area lies within a mule deer summer use and seasonal migration area and is sage grouse habitat. In addition, small mammal and passerine bird species which occupy similar sagebrush steppe habitats can be expected to occur here (i.e. flat to sloping terrain on southern aspects). The area around the proposed trough location has been very lightly grazed or not grazed for a substantial period of time. The addition of a trough to the area would attract cattle and likely cause changes in vegetation structure and composition. Characteristically, impact to the vegetation from trailing, grazing, bedding, and fecal matter deposition, is greatest within one mile of trough sites. The vegetation component most affected by grazing would be the herbaceous understory (grass and forb species). A decrease in shrub canopy cover within a one-mile radius of the trough may occur over time. Due to the vegetation changes mentioned, this could affect the ability of song bird species to use the area for nesting, brood/clutch rearing, and seeking cover from predators.

Several sage grouse night roosts are within 0.5 mile of the proposed trough site. A substantial number of sage grouse (30+/- individuals) occupy these roost sites on a regular basis. This aggregation of night roosts is closely associated with lek 4b, approximately 0.75 miles to the north of the project. Vegetation types on these night roosts (i.e. small, flat to sloping "benches") are usually not attractive to cattle for grazing or bedding.

The pipeline installation portion of the project should cause little disturbance of the vegetation and soils and should not cause any long term impact to mule deer, sage grouse, or other species use of the area. Temporary disturbance and avoidance of the area by most species would occur from the presence of humans.

The proposed project would improve grazing distribution. If implemented in conjunction with the Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines, the project would improve wildlife habitat conditions in other portions of the allotment that have historically been overgrazed.

Minerals

There would be no impact to mineral resources because no extraction or substantial disturbance to mineral soils is proposed.

Cumulative Effects

This project is expected to have positive cumulative effects to overall rangeland health on approximately 2,000 acres (1 mile radius) of the Bodie Mountain Allotment due to better distribution of cattle grazing onto currently under-utilized areas and decreasing cattle concentration in currently over-utilized portions of the allotment (i.e. Tailings Pond, Seven Troughs, and Red Cloud Meadow). The addition of a cattle trough to the area would cause a semi-permanent (as long as the trough is active) cumulative effect on about 1.94 acres (100 foot radius) of sagebrush steppe habitat immediately surrounding the trough. Specific impacts around the trough include loss of vegetation and compaction of soils.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts

The following mitigation measures would be applied to the project:

This project would be implemented in conjunction with implementation of the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines. Monitoring would be conducted to assure that vegetation impacts are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines.

Existing roosting areas would be monitored to determine if livestock bedding occurs in these areas and if bedding is resulting in abandonment by roosting sage grouse. On-going monitoring would continue at lek 4b to provide data for continued evaluation of potential affects of this project.

If during construction, previously unknown cultural resources are discovered, all work would cease until BLM's Archeologist completes further analysis and approval is given by the Authorized Officer to proceed.

After two years, monitoring data on progress towards achieving Rangeland Health Standards and potential impacts to sage grouse would be reviewed and a determination would be made whether the project should be installed as a permanent range project.

Implementation Monitoring

The BLM Range staff would be responsible for ensuring construction compliance in accordance with the provisions of this EA.

Literature Cited

CRMP 1992. Bodie Mountain Coordinated Resource Management Plan, May 1992.
Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100,
Bishop, CA 93514.

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Date Prepared:_____

Reviewed By:_____ **Date:**_____

Joe Pollini
Bishop Field Office Environmental Coordinator

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT / DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this EA and determined that the need for this project supports the objectives of helping to implement the livestock grazing strategy for the Bodie Mountain allotment. This would occur by providing better grazing distribution into additional forage areas that have been previously unusable due to lack of water. This project is an important component of efforts to better distribute livestock grazing on the allotment to help achieve Bishop RMP desired plant community goals, and to implement the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines of June 1999 (approved July 2000).

Reducing the amount of cattle grazing use within the Bodie Bowl ACEC, east of Bodie Bluff, would reduce utilization levels of the vegetation, which would contribute to maintaining or improving the naturalness and visual quality of this historic area. The overall affect of distributing cattle grazing over a larger area would have a positive influence on vegetation condition.

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below would not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

There would be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the proposed action. Additional mitigation and monitoring measures proposed below would allow reevaluation of the project impacts after a trial period of two years.

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the Bishop RMP, which was approved March 25, 1993. This plan has been reviewed and the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

It is my decision to implement the project with the following mitigation measures.

Mitigation Measures / Remarks

The following mitigation measures would be applied to the project:

This project would be implemented in conjunction with implementation of the BLM Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines. Monitoring would be conducted to assure that vegetation impacts are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines.

Existing roosting areas would be monitored to determine if livestock bedding occurs in these areas and if bedding is resulting in abandonment by roosting sage grouse. On-going monitoring would continue at lek 4b to provide data for continued evaluation of potential affects of this project.

If during construction, previously unknown cultural resources are discovered, all work would cease until BLM's Archeologist completes further analysis and approval is given by the Authorized Officer to proceed.

After two years, monitoring data on progress towards achieving Rangeland Health Standards and potential impacts to sage grouse would be reviewed and a determination would be made whether the project should be installed as a permanent range project.

Authorized Officer : _____
Bill Dunkelberger, Bishop Field Office Manager

Date: _____